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Survival at Sixteen

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Survival at Sixteen

In the snapshot, four girls sit
around a smoking campfire, sunlight splotching
us in patches, each girl hunched and writing in a notebook
she will never see again. The trees, cropped
by white borders, extend in every
way around us. Beyond:
slivers of a tea-colored lake, a night screaming
loon that wakes us to darkness and reminds
us the world is not always what it seems.

In our hunger, we talk and write of our desires:
eggs, milkshakes, water not tasting of lake decay
and iodine. Evergreen smoke envelops
us, but mosquitoes still chase us into our fitful
sleep and dreams. I stand on shore and walk
into the lake because I have to—down
the sloping bottom, down through
murkiness, where I think I will die
breathing in a world of bluegills,
duckweed, and diving loons.

We each drift away from shared words—
chew our nails, cattail roots, pens, and one
of us chews a small flute like bone.
We are burnt through
by hungers, lost to the world,
only reluctantly returned.

GLYNIS BENBOW-NIEMIER

